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A PLAN FOR INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION IN SPELLING FOR JUNIOR HIGH.

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THIS REPORT IS A DOCUMENTATION OF A PLAN FOR INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION IN SPELLING FOR THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AT PLATEAU VALLEY SCHOOL, COLLBRAN, COLORADO. THE PROGRAM IS STRUCTURED SUCH THAT STUDENTS OF SIMILAR ABILITY AND ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS ARE PAIRED FOR STUDY AND TESTING PURPOSES. AFTER THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATES MASTERY OF A SPELLING LIST THROUGH A SERIES OF TESTS, HE MOVES ON TO A MORE DIFFICULT LIST. THE RATIONALE, RELATED RESEARCH, CLASSROOM PROCEDURE, RESULTS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARE DISCUSSED. (JH)

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COLORADO WESTERN STATES SMALL SCHOOLS PROJECT

DOCUMENTATION

A PLAN FOR INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION IN SPELLING FOR JUNIOR HIGH

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1963 - 64

COLO. STATE DEPT. OF EDUCATION · DENVER
BYRON W. HANSFORD
COMMISSIONER

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THE WESTERN STATES SMALL SCHOOLS PROJECT

The Western States Small Schools Project, partly financed by a grant from the Ford Foundation, is designed to help the state education agencies in Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah in their efforts to improve instruction in the necessarily existent small schools. The Project began January, 1961 and will end August, 1965. Policy Board of the Project is composed of the chief state school officers of the cooperating states. Ralph G. Bohrson, Coordinator of the WSSSP, is headquartered in Denver, at the Colorado State Department of Education.

The Colorado portion of the Project, involving more than two hundred teachers and administrators in approximately thirty schools has been working in the following areas:

-- Ungraded or Continuous Progress Programs

-- Use of Self-Instructional Materials

-- Teacher Education and In-Service Programs

-- Institutes for Rural School Board Members

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I. REASONS FOR AN INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM IN SPELLING

1. Student data.

IOWA TEST SCORES

Seventh Grade				Eighth Grade			
Grade Levels in Spelling							
Norms	7.8	6.8	5.8	Norms	8.8	7.8	6.8
	1964	1963	1962		1964	1963	1962
Student Number				Student Number			
1	12.4	11.5	8.9	1	12.5	12.1	11.0
2	12.5	10.1	9.1	2	9.5	7.8	6.9
3	11.9	10.8	8.1	3	9.3	8.0	6.4
4	10.4	9.4	8.5	4	9.2	9.3	8.2
5	9.9	7.5	6.3	5	9.1	9.3	8.0
6	9.9	8.8	8.9	6	9.0	8.0	7.5
7	8.8	7.6	7.0	7	9.0	8.4	8.8
8	8.8	8.4	7.1				
9	8.4	7.2	6.1				
10	8.2	7.9	6.9				
11	8.1	7.0	7.3				
12	8.0	6.8	6.3				
13	7.6	8.0	7.1	8	8.7	8.1	7.2
14	7.6	6.4	6.1	9	8.4	6.4	5.9
15	7.6	5.9	5.7	10	8.1	7.0	5.3
16	7.5	6.0	5.3	11	8.0	7.9	7.5
17	7.1	6.4	4.5	12	7.7	6.3	5.9
18	6.9	5.8	4.7	13	7.6	7.5	5.6
19	6.7	6.7	4.9	14	7.6	6.9	6.4
20	6.7	6.3	3.4	15	7.0	5.1	5.3
21	6.6	6.1	5.2	16	7.0	7.0	5.8
22	6.4	5.2	4.2	17	7.0	7.0	5.9
23	6.4	4.8	4.5	18	7.0	6.3	5.6
24	6.4	5.9	4.5	19	6.8	4.7	4.9
25	6.1	3.9	3.2	20	6.8	6.0	5.6
26	5.2	5.4	4.1	21	6.8	6.4	5.6
				22	6.6	6.3	5.8

2. Needs indicated by curriculum deficiencies. There is no curriculum set up on the secondary level in our school. I have developed a curriculum of my own, and felt it was not adequate in spelling. This was one reason for choosing this particular research and development proposal. The Colorado

Language Arts Society is working on curriculum development for a statewide K-12 program and I hope this will be a definite help to language arts teachers in the future. As it will take some time for this program to be set up, I felt it necessary to go ahead and do something about spelling in my own situation.

3. Needs indicated by existing student behavior. Students in my English classes have always dreaded spelling lists and tests as such. Two years ago I threw out the spelling workbooks which had been used for several years previously. It seemed to me that the workbooks took too much time for "busy work" and all the students didn't learn these lists. The fast learners knew the words before studying them in the workbooks, and the slow learners were unable to learn words of this difficulty.

I then taught spelling as presented in the text book, English In Action Junior, accordinating spelling with the regular English program. Instead of having a regular spelling list on a certain day each week, the classes spent two or three successive days on spelling every two or three weeks. I also used lists of words from literature units as we did those, and thus combined vocabulary and spelling. In eighth grade I also teach United States History and coordinated necessary words and terms with spelling and vocabulary as in literature. These methods I plan to continue. I feel, however, that not enough spelling of basic words is covered in this way, and so decided to try my own program.

Behavior and attitudes of students toward spelling changed immediately upon inauguration of this new program. Students in both classes of all ability ranges look forward to the days we have spelling. For the first time in teaching English I have students asking for spelling more often than it can be given.

4. Unique advantages or weaknesses of my school situation which prompted or required my effort. In our school there is no curriculum set up, so we are free to do work in any areas we wish, within reason, of course.

Our district, while not able to spend unlimited amounts on materials, has been lenient in purchasing whatever the teachers requisition. Even though we must be reasonable in the amounts ordered, we may choose what we want in the way of materials.

This school district has only one school, so there is no pressure to outdo another school. Since there is just one class per grade there is no competition here. This lack of pressure and freedom to choose might lead to poor teaching, but I feel it is a challenge.

The administration is not only cooperative, but encourages us to try new ideas and materials. This factor tends to make a teacher more alert and creative.

Since we have only one class per grade there can be no class grouping into high ability classes or low ability. This means that each class has a wide span in ability and achievement. Individualized work, it seems to me, is essential for children in these classes to progress, each as he is able. The weakness in our particular situation is that the size of our classes is too large to individualize to the degree that we would like to. Some group work is necessary, especially in totally new areas for the students, as the teacher cannot help each child individually when the classes run close to thirty students or more. Some group work is necessary for children in these classes to progress to their maximum. If instruction is not individualized the slow learners are slowly left further and further behind and the fast learners become more and more disinterested and either become behavior problems or withdraw into themselves. Instruction is such classes have always been individualized to some extent, the teacher tries to give extra help to the ones who need it and work in depth to the advanced learners, but a better way of individualizing is needed.

I chose spelling as a starting point as I realized there would be too much confusion if I tried to individualize all phases of English at once.

Spelling was also the subject which was most in need of help. It is an individual problem anyway, was most disliked, and I felt most poorly taught.

Another advantage (or possible disadvantage) which my small school situation offered is that I have English in grades seven, eight, and nine, and thus will be able to carry out the program with the same students for three years. If the individualized program is creating a positive attitude in the students and the students are learning and practicing ways of learning to spell words, and if they are learning words they are able to learn, there should be definite improvement in the three year period.

II. SUMMARY OF RELATED RESEARCH

1. Students lists. Spelling has always been a problem for me personally, and as a teacher it is one area I would especially like to be of some actual help to my students. As I have taught I have also reached the conclusion that ability in reading and in many other areas does not necessarily correlate with ability to spell.

"How the student got to be a problem. Spelling is not a problem for everyone. Some young people master spelling easily, almost unconsciously, by the time they reach college, just as they learn table manners, or driving a car, or dancing. Some of our spelling difficulties may be traced to our method of learning how to read. We read by words instead of by letters; we scarcely notice the arrangement of letters in a word. Our minds have never been trained to focus on letters. In a way this is good, and in a way that is bad. Then there are some whose minds--often very good minds--work in ways not particularly adapted to learning spelling."[1]

The desire to do something about spelling in my English classes began when I took a course in teaching English in grades 7-12 at Colorado University in the summer of 1962. At that time I did considerable reading on the subject and since then have continued to read everything on the subject that I have had access to in periodicals and other publications.

The first report I studied carefully was "A Common-Sense Approach to

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[1] Kiersek. The Macmillan Handbook of English. p. 392.

Teaching Spelling," by Vivian B. Maine and Royal J. Morsey, published by Ball State Teachers College of Muncie, Indiana. This is a method whereby students make their own spelling lists from themes and other compositions work and spend two to four, thirty-five minute periods a week on spelling. The study is carefully set up and documented. I quote from the Forward,--

"The purpose of A Common-Sense Approach to Teaching Spelling is threefold:

A. To compare achievement in spelling of 304 high school students who received individualized instruction in spelling with 285 senior high school students who received traditional instruction in spelling.

B. To analyze the frequency and nature of spelling errors made by 589 senior high school students in 589 letters written in class in September, 1959, and 489 letters written in class in May, 1960.

C. To encourage interested elementary and high school English teachers to test in their own classrooms the common sense (individualized) approach to teaching spelling."

The conclusions reached from this study were favorable and I quote here only the first one.

"Since the gains made in spelling by the experimental students, most of whose teachers used the common-sense approach to spelling, equalled those of the control students, whose teachers used the traditional approach to spelling, it seems justifiable to recommend the common-sense approach. The participants checking of the individual experimental student's mastery of his individual spelling list was accomplished while his classmates were working on another assignment. The traditional approach to spelling usually requires a minimum of thirty-five minutes per week of every student's class time.

"The common-sense approach to teaching spelling is also supported by the well-known fact that a student who earns A s on spelling tests made up of word lists may misspell a dozen words per page when he writes a letter to his Aunt Wilma. To be effective, instruction in spelling must be related closely to writing and must lean very heavily on the development of the dictionary habit, a habit that is more likely to be developed through the common-sense approach than through the work-list approach to teaching spelling."[2]

From this study I began using individual lists on ninth and tenth grade English classes. I found, however, that most students habitually misspelled perhaps as few as five words and never more than eight or ten in composition work. Words they were unfamiliar with they usually checked with the dictionary.

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[2] Maine, Vivian, and Morsey, Royal. A Common-Sense Approach to Teaching Spelling, p. 13.

I did evolve an individual word list which was valuable as vocabulary building and included all new words in any subject or reading done by the student. I found this individual list idea far more practical for vocabulary building than spelling.

My conclusion was that the individual list idea is valid, but that in order for students to learn more words, lists needed to be provided for them in addition to the lists they make from their own mistakes in composition.

2. What and how? The next reference which provided me with more background was the chapter on spelling in The Teaching of High School English by J. N. Hook. Under the section "Research in the Teaching of Spelling" Hook says:

> "Even more profitable has been the research of men and women who have studied children rather than words. The difference in the two approaches is this: The word specialist asks, "What are the characteristics of the words that people need to know how to spell?" The child specialist asks, "How can children most efficaciously be taught to spell?" The word specialist is interested in the words to be mastered; the child specialist is interested in building students' desire and power to master words."[3]

This basic idea is one I have tried to use in setting up my program.

Under the heading "Building the Power to Spell" Hook says:

> "If students are sufficiently motivated, many of them will be willing to go through the rather laborious steps recommended by Ernest Horn and Ernest Ashbaugh, two of the foremost authorities on spelling. These steps, as slightly modified by an NCTE committee, are as follows:
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> 'In studying a word, a good procedure for a learner is, (1) to say each syllable distinctly and look at the syllable as he says it, (2) with eyes closed to think how the word looks, (3) to look at the word again to check his impression, (4) to write the word and check with the book, and (5) to repeat twice the writing and checking. If on any one of these five trials he misspells the word, he should copy it in his spelling notebook for review. Finally, he should write the group of words studied as a parent, brother, sister, or friend pronounces them for him.'
>
> E. W. Dolch comments on the characteristics of the good speller:
>
> '...the "good speller" (1) checks his guesses, (2) proofreads for spelling, and (3) studies the spelling of new words, which means (a) he gets the exact pronunciation of each new word, (b) he asks if this sounding tells the letters, and (c) where it does not, he finds a means of remembering the exact letters at the difficult spot. He makes this rapid check in all

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[3]Hook, J. N. The Teaching of High School English. p. 393.

subjects, in English, in history, in science, or what not. He habitually makes this check, and does it in a few seconds only.

Good spelling, in other words, is dependent upon good spelling habits, and good spelling habits are dependent largely upon good attitudes. If wholesome attitudes have been created, what can be done to expedite the formation of good habits?'[4]

This "see, say, write" method is carefully presented in our text, English in Action, Junior. This method is carefully taught to the class, and used for several lists before students work on individual lists.

Another section of Hook's chapter states:

"Sometimes students misspell words because they mispronounce them. Slovenly or otherwise inaccurate pronunciation of such words as athletic, divide, government, laboratory, recognize, and ridiculous may lead to misspelling. The proverbial stone thrown at one bird, incorrect pronunciation, may often glance off and kill a second, faulty spelling."[5]

By pairing students up for pronunciation (each child pronounces his list to his partner) I have found that the students are very aware of the sounds of words, and they insist that their partner pronounce correctly so they won't misspell the word. This works in two ways for it helps the pronouncer spell the word correctly when it is his turn to write the word.

3. Practical word lists. By this time, after approximately two years of studying and trying out various ideas in the classroom, I began to know what kind of a program I actually wanted to try. The next problem was the word lists. After much studying of lists put out by various companies I decided to use the lists in the Colorado Course of Study for Elementary Schools (1942). I finally turned to the list in desperation realizing that it was old and outmoded. What I wanted were lists of basic words which progresses in difficulty at each grade level. I also wanted plenty of words for each level. I remembered that the course of study had many more lists than newer programs and so looked it over. I found that except for a few words which are not often used anymore, and a few spellings which have changed that these word lists

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[4] Ibid. pp. 395-96.
[5] Ibid. p. 398.

were what I needed. I simply cross out a few words and change the spellings of those that have changed--checking with Webster's--and have plenty of basic words for each grade level that progress in difficulty. Another point in favor of these lists is that some words are repeated from list to list with various prefixes and suffixes, thus giving the student this phase of spelling, and repetition in basic words as needed.

The programed materials available which I had examined did not seem practical to me. The SRA spelling lab, it seemed to me, needed to have pronunciation of some kind added, and would need to have tapes made and individual head phones to go with it. This simply is not practical in my large class situation. Another weakness in this program is that words are presented in phonic grouping and did not seem to me to be as practical as groups of words as needed. It is perhaps more practical at the lower grade levels.

Grouping of words is discussed by Hook:

"Wise grouping of words seems desirable, although the scientific evidence in favor of grouping is not overwhelming."[6]

III. PROCEDURE IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Skills needed for the students. Teach the "see, say, write" method carefully and use it in the class for at least six group lessons (lists) before beginning individualized work.

2. Placement testing. Administer a test for placing students on the various levels. I made a test of six groups of words, twenty words in each group, on grade levels of fourth grade through eighth grade and one group above eighth grade level. There was a total of 120 words beginning with the lowest level (fourth grade) and progressing by levels to the highest level (ninth grade and above). This test proved effective as each child progressed well until he reached a part of the test where he began missing one-third to one-half of the

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[6]Ibid. p. 398.

words. The two classes grouped as follows:

Level	Seventh Grade		Eighth Grade	
	Jan. 1	May 1	Nov. 25	May 1
A--Fourth grade	4		4	
B--Fifth grade	5	3	2	1
C--Sixth grade	13	10	10	11
D--Seventh grade	2	7	4	3
E--Eighth grade	3	4	7	4
F--Ninth and above	5	8	2	10

The figures for each class, January 1, and November 25 place the classes according to the placement test. The second columns of figures, May first, show the levels the children of each class have attained.

3. Selecting partners. On the basis of the above placement test the students in both classes were paired off. As the various levels didn't always have an even number there were two sets of three in the seventh grade and one set of three in the eighth grade. Each student had as his partner another student beginning at the same level.

4. Grouping of word lists. Word lists were prepared, with ample copies of each list so no child would have to wait for a copy of his list. Each group of word lists for each grade level were put into a folder which was labeled with a letter only. No grade levels appeared on these folders.

On levels A and B (grade 4 and 5) there were only five lists of twenty words each. This would take these students on to C level as soon as it seemed feasible.

On levels C, D, and E (grades 6, 7, and 8), the original program had ten lists of twenty words each. The F (above eighth level) had thirty words per list.

5. Individual folders. Each student was given a folder for his own spelling. In these are kept both copies of each list the child wrote from the dictation of his partner. These lists are checked for errors by the students. Before the final test is given over several lists by the teacher, the folders are handed in by whichever student or students are ready for the final test. These lists are checked carefully. Occasionally a student doesn't find a misspelled word.

It is important that these lists be checked carefully before the final test. After the final test is given it is kept in the folder and the old lists are thrown away. These final tests are the only papers that accumulate in the folders over a long period of time, and I believe it is good for the students to have these at their fingertips as they can easily see their own progress.

6. The program set-up. Students are given their folders, on which are placed the student's name, the letter of his level, and the list with which he is to begin his work. Partners are named by the teacher. Instructions for using the program are given. Students are to study alone using the "see, say, write" method. Next they are to give and take the list of words they have studied. Pronouncing these words has done much to help them spell correctly. The student corrects his own list, or if he prefers he may correct his partners list. He then studies the words he missed, again using the "see, say, write" method. Each student takes his list a second time, even if he gets all the words right on the first test. If he doesn't get 100 on the second writing, he takes the list a third time. The students soon found that it paid to study carefully and learn the words before taking them.

After the student has finished four to six lists in this way a final test is given by the teacher. There are some tests to be given at each spelling class after the program is started. Tests are made up from students individual folders and include words missed on both lists students have taken with partners. These tests are cumulative from all students on each level. Most students miss some of the same words and tests have four to eight words from each twenty word list. so tests vary from thirty to fifty words depending on how many lists are covered. This is the grade entered in the grade book. Most students average a test every two weeks if we have two spelling classes a week. They are covering, on the average, a list each class.

Class periods seem to be most effective if at least thirty minutes in length. A majority of the students seem to need this length of time to

accomplish what they want to get done in a session. If the class lasts longer, I find the students waste time and tend to play.

7. New methods and techniques. Some of the students move rather quickly from level to level. These may be students who have not been very interested in spelling previously. Most of the students soon realize which is the low level, and which is the high. One seventh grader, who is quite able in his other subjects, and who began on the A level, was determined to move out, and asked to take lists home to study. He had taken ten lists and was on the C level in about three weeks, when the majority of the class had covered four to six lists. This level was a little above his ability and he has had to slow up, but is still studying very hard, and has done well enough on his final tests that he has been able to stay on the C level.

Somehow, as the children have shifted from level to level it has worked out that all the children are in pairs and there are no more groups of threes. This is really more efficient.

The group of students in the F level seemed to need more than word lists. They now have their choice of lists or working in Word Wealth, Junior, which lends itself very well to individualized work, or cross word puzzles, which I have from "The English Journal." These puzzles are difficult and help build vocabulary. The students who went to the county spelling contest were in this level, and worked in "Words of Champions" as did any of the others on this level who wanted to.

IV. IMPROVEMENT RESULTING FROM PROGRAM

1. Evaluation of Results. The Iowa test scores were encouraging if some tabulating is done (see page 1). With the seventh grade students there were ten who did not progress a year from 1962-63 and sixteen who made at least a year's progress. The scores of 1964 showed gain here of seventeen who made more than a year's progress. This interpretation is not significant, except

that it shows that the students did not lose ground in spelling. If the gains of each student are totaled the results look somewhat better. The total gain for all twenty-six students from 1962 to 1963 is 26.9 years, and from 1963-1964 is 28.2 years. There were twelve students who tested above their grade level in 1964, and their average gain was 2.0 years. There were fourteen who tested below their grade level, and their gain was 2.7 years. So both groups made about the same progress.

In the eighth grade there were records on the Iowa tests for three successive years for twenty-two students. There were fourteen of these students in both comparisons who made less than a year's progress and eight who have made more than a year's progress. There was no change here. The total gain for all eighth grade students from 1962 to 1963 was 14.9 years and from 1963-1964 was 17.5 years. This is a slower group than the seventh grade so there were not as large gains, but the figures show more gain for students below their grade level in eighth grade than in the seventh. The total average gain for the seven eighth grade students above grade level was .6, and for those fifteen below grade level was 3.2 years. This again shows more gain in the lower group.

The most significant result of this program is not measurable, but is the attitude of the students. The fact that the student can learn to spell the words on his list has changed the attitude of hopelessness with which most poor spellers face their spelling lessons to one of hope. When these students realize that they, too, can get 100, they want to work and learn as many words as the other students, and they soon realize that they can. The fact that their partners are also working on the same level stimulates them. The attitude of the good spellers changed from boredom to one of wanting to work, also. They do more competing among themselves than any other groups.

The next most significant result is the habits the children soon establish for learning the words. They become very spelling conscious, and I am getting

in papers both in language classes and in the social studies classes with no spelling errors in most cases, and perhaps only one or two errors on papers in which students formerly had many errors.

The last important result is that the students are taking the responsibility for their own progress. Each one seems to realize that he can go as far as he wants, and with one or two exceptions in each class, the students have learned to work alone. My role as teacher has changed from that of pronouncing words and trying to make the students study, to helping and watching each child's progress. I enjoy the class as much as the students.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a few changes which would strengthen this program. Next year I plan to use it with the ninth grade, as these students are enthusiastic. I am not sure that it will be effective at this level, and if it is not, it will soon be obvious. Working in pairs may not be feasible as high school students fast become more sophisticated. I may have to make some changes for this level.

Some recommendations for changes in the program itself are that a level below A (fourth grade) may be needed for one or two students in each class. The B level (fifth grade) should be extended to about eight lists as there seems to be too much of a jump to the C level. Students in the C level (sixth grade) have had more difficulty than at the other levels, and I have expanded it to twelve lists, but plan on probably sixteen lists at this level next year. This expansion will call for relettering the program, and would divide the C level into two groups. Sixteen lists on one level would be discouraging.

It was suggested earlier that the "see, say, write" method be taught carefully before the program is used. If the students begin to get careless about using this before they take lists, it soon becomes obvious from the number of words they miss. After the individual work has been used for about three weeks, or perhaps at some other time when the need is obvious, the "see,

say, write" method should be reviewed. This could be done with words from literature, science, or social studies as a class unit.

The last recommendation for using the program is that care be used in pairing up the students. It may be necessary to do some changing of partners, but if care is used this can be kept at a minimum. In both classes pairs were mixed, some were both girls, some both boys, and some were girl and boy. The students seemed indifferent, perhaps because I was careful not to put students together that I knew didn't like each other. I had no one ask to change partners, and in most cases the partners took an interest in the progress of the other one, and seemed to work as a team.

One suggestion in closing applies to any spelling program. If a teacher insists that papers have no spelling errors, and simply returns papers without correcting spelling errors, and without grades, the students soon begin having correct spelling at least on the papers that are handed in. This seems quite impossible at first, but does get results. It is individualization in the true sense as the student is responsible for his own spelling.